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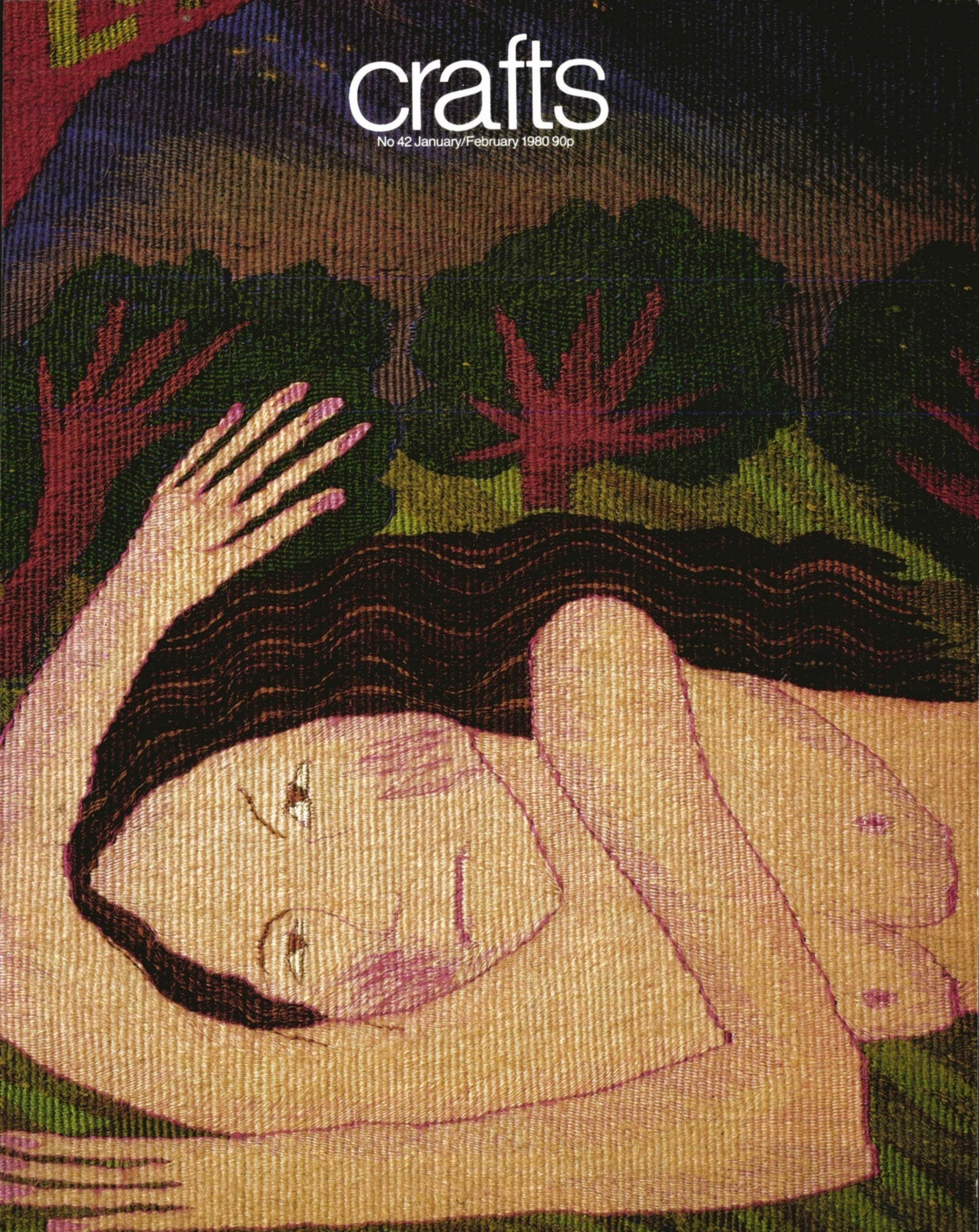

TAPESTRY INTO LANDSCAPE

IS THE WRITING ON THE WALL FOR THE CRAFT OF LETTERING?

BLOOMSBURY STYLE BY QUENTIN BELL

PLUS

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT ON TEXTILE COURSES

Curtain by Helen Cowie and furniture by Nigel Shelley

Poland, and I should have liked to see examples of Plevka-Schmidt's and Muszynska's full three-dimensional structures.

However, this is only a small point, and there was much to enjoy in the exhibition. Each piece demonstrated the most assured handling of material: Sadley's of form and structure; Chojnacka's of simplicity and restraint; Jung's of lightness and sensitivity; Krowacka's of design and colour; and Bochen-Jasionowska's of organic strength and texture. Finally, there were the overpowering figures of Maria Laszkiewicz, expressing both the clothed exterior and form of the human figure as a lonely animal. Her four figures were striking reminders of this invigorating and self-examining artist, whose encouragement and support of Polish weavers after the War (the basement of her flat was used as an open studio) did much for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiments. The present weaving studio in the House of Plastic Arts in Warsaw, transferred from her premises in 1965, has ensured the continuing growth and expansion of Polish textile art.

JANIS JEFFERIES

TAPESTRIES, RUGS AND CARPETS BY MARY FARMER

South Hill Park Arts Centre, Bracknell
22 September–21 October

Mary Farmer's exhibition at Bracknell was an opportunity to see the recent work of one of our most promising weavers. Thirteen works were shown on the staircase of the Italianate mansion which forms the hub of the South Hill Park Arts Centre. Not an ideal setting for rugs, which should (but almost never can) be shown on the floor. Nevertheless, as one climbed the stairs, the impact of the large twill rug, *6C*, set amid the smaller tapestries, was very powerful; and then, as one reached the landing and turned and looked across the well of the stairs at some of the larger rugs, vivid with blacks and yellows and blues, one experienced an excitement which made one congratulate this enterprising arts centre yet again.

Most of the pieces in this exhibition demonstrated Mary Farmer's preoccupation with colour. It was her search for additional depth of colour that led her from painting to weaving in the first place. She employs, in the main, simple weft-faced tapestry weave, but uses woollen yarn of the highest quality available. Her execution is excellent. She organises blocks of colour so that looking at such rugs as *Bright Sides, Shades* and *Vista* was still rather like looking at abstract canvases, with the additional bonus, of course, that these pieces could be (and their creator would wish them to be) walked on, felt and used.

The smaller tapestries at first seemed quite different, but on reflection the same themes of colour and form were there. Scale altered, but did not diminish, the impact. I particularly like *Flash Back,* which combined stripes with a block of bright blue in the centre. The pair, *¼ back 1* and *¼ back 2,* with their triangles of subtly differing colour suspended in similar red backgrounds, said something as only this artist can say it. My favourite small tapestry was *Blue Heaven,* which, while retaining the elements of form and colour, seemed to introduce a new emphasis on texture. In this, the contrast of shiny with rough fibre complemented the form in a uniquely weaver-like (as opposed to painterly) way. Mary Farmer feels that in weaving she can "construct the image", and in this small piece that was exactly what she had done, with consummate success.

It is always interesting to speculate as to how an artist will develop (and good though these pieces are, I feel that we have yet to see the best of Mary Farmer's work). I imagine that it is in this area of texture that she will progress. Already in both small and large pieces her use of black shows signs of this development. It was most clearly seen, however, in my favourite piece, the twill rug, *6C,* which at first sight looked so different from any of Mary Farmer's other work, but which had in fact developed from another recent rug now at the Crafts Council. This rug, seen from a distance, seemed a hazy pink, but when one got closer one saw that it was composed of vibrant blues and reds: here again the scale had altered the impact. It was a masterly use of twill, excellently executed, and it seemed to synthesise the very best of Mary Farmer's talents. Her special use of colour and form were there, but the result was something that could only be achieved by *weaving.* I look forward to following her career with great interest.

PATRICIA CLEVELAND-PECK

FABRICS BY HELEN COWIE AND FURNITURE BY NIGEL SHELLEY

City Museum and Art Gallery, Portsmouth
22 September–28 October

The broadsheet that accompanies this exhibition claims that, because the exhibitors trained as interior designers, they are therefore more concerned than most craftsmen with manipulating space. I found that only the furniture-maker, Nigel Shelley, lived up to expectations and that the curtain-maker – or should I say textile artist? – Helen Cowie, achieved at best high-camp, illusionistic, rippling murals that created no more space than the straight photographic landscapes from which they appeared to have been taken.

Working on areas of heavy cotton sateen, sometimes as large as 4·8×7·5m (*Jungle Curtains,* 1976), Helen Cowie draws in pencil and painstakingly paints with fabric dye a scene rich in detail, but clichéd in imagery and rather dead in execution: this one I named *South Pacific.* I longed to see a spontaneous, huge stroke of